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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how recent economic, demographic, and social changes have created the conditions that are presently constricting the opportunities and future expectations of today's urban young men. While research indicates that all disadvantaged youth in urban areas are facing impediments to their success, the paper focuses on the realities of disadvantaged young men in their mid-teens to early twenties. The following factors and influences are examined: (1) economic trends; (2) demographic trends; (3) urban poverty; (4) family formation; (5) educational achievement; (6) drugs and violence; (7) incarceration; and (8) lack of supports. The paper asserts that a growing number of youth and families need assistance if they are to overcome the forces of poverty, joblessness, and racism that place them at risk of not realizing their potential as self-sufficient and productive citizens. Today's disadvantaged young men in urban areas desperately need supervision during nonschool and summer hours while their parents are at work, which should incorporate the following elements: (1) consistent adult relationships; (2) supplemental education; (3) health care and counseling; (4) recreational activities; (5) safe and clean facilities; (6) skills development; and (7) improvements in self-esteem. Efforts to help these young men must comprehend the reality of urban life in the 1990s. A bibliography listing 68 references is appended. (AF)

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STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCCESS:

A Look at Disadvantaged Young Men in Urban Areas

A paper of the Forum on Public/Private Social Concern

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PREFACE

This is the first in a series of background papers prepared for the Forum on Public/Private Social Concern, which this year is focused on disadvantaged young men in urban areas. The Forum brings together government, foundation and business leaders, especially policy-makers and funders, and works to improve the effectiveness of program resources addressed to domestic social issues. It is a new effort of the Union Institute Center for Public Policy, undertaken with support from the Ford Foundation and W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

The paper is intended to help set the context for this first year of the Forum. Current economic and social structures often work together to create almost insurmountable obstacles for disadvantaged urban young men, and this paper explores the barriers to success which confront them daily.

The Forum works to promote shared understandings of each social problem's overall context, key intervention points, and innovative program models. It helps enable participants to learn from one another, to develop relationships that enrich the funding, policy and program decisions made by each.

The Forum is guided by an Advisory Board of experts from each sector, supplemented by a Project Panel of experts on the annual topic. Their expertise, and willingness to share their time, ideas, and resources have helped strengthen this paper and the Forum as a whole.

The paper was prepared by Sarah Jones, Associate Coordinator of the Forum. Her doggedness and determination in sorting through contradictory statistics, and her openness to new ideas, ensured that this paper would raise exciting questions and begin Forum discussions in a thoughtful and thought-provoking way.

Mark Rosenman
Director

Margaret A. Siegel
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October 1990

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A Look at Disadvantaged Young Men in Urban Areas

A paper of the
Forum on Public/Private Social Concern

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STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS TO SUCCESS

Are we losing a generation of young men? Currently, 7.3 million (23%) 16-24 year olds are not in school, not attached to or seeking entry into the primary labor market, and are not enrolled in the military.[1] Although research indicates that all disadvantaged[2] youth in urban areas are facing impediments to their success, this paper will focus on the realities of **disadvantaged young men** in their mid-teens to early twenties.

A growing proportion of this population lacks the basic skills necessary to compete in today's changing labor market. Those men who are employed, yet lack a high school or college degree, are finding it increasingly difficult to earn enough to support themselves (and their families) above the poverty level. Disadvantaged young men are at the greatest risk of dropping out of school, becoming fathers prematurely, becoming the victims of and arrested for violent criminal activity, and facing chronic unemployment. This paper will explore how recent economic, demographic and social changes have created the conditions that are presently constricting the opportunities and future expectations of today's urban young men.

While public attention is currently focused on inner-city black young men, all disadvantaged youth are facing structural barriers that are inhibiting their success. The risk of viewing these issues as a primarily black or minority concern is to exclude many who need assistance, blame the victim, and fail to realize that solutions must be essentially structural in nature. **To move beyond short-range efforts and toward effective long-range investment in the development of the most disadvantaged youth, it is necessary to recognize that problems affecting youth are directly linked to poverty and structural shifts in U.S. society.**

ECONOMIC TRENDS

Since WWII, major economic transformations have drastically altered the American labor market. Specifically, the earnings structure, the mix of occupations, and the educational requirements necessary for employment have all changed dramatically. As we shall see, young men with limited skills, living in our central cities, have suffered notably from these changes.

For the purpose of understanding these trends, many economists divide post-WWII America into two distinct phases: before and after 1973. The 26 year period after the war was a time of economic prosperity in which productivity, inflation-adjusted wages (hereafter "real wages"), and standards of living increased and poverty rates declined. The period after 1973 is often referred to as a quiet depression in which the growth of productivity came to a halt, real wages declined, and unemployment and poverty rates began to escalate.

After 1973, all workers experienced some decline in real earnings, but young workers with limited education and low seniority were the hardest hit. **In 1986 the real median income of males (20-24) was one-fourth (25.8%) less than their peers of 1973.**[3] For high school dropouts and black males, the situation was worse. Dropouts earned 42% less in 1986 than their contemporaries of 1973. **Between 1959 and 1973, the real median income of young black males rose 68%, from 1973 to 1984 it decreased by 44%.**[4] (Comparative Census Bureau statistics are not available during this time period for Hispanics.)

In addition, fewer young men are participating in the labor market. In 1973, 7.3% of 20-24 year old males reported no earnings; by 1984 the rate had climbed to 12%.[5] For inner-city black youth, the situation may be reaching crisis proportions. Nationally, the unemployment rate of young black males is 2 1/2 to 3 times greater than that of young white men.[6] According to William Julius Wilson, in the inner-city where there is a high concentration of impoverished, unskilled black youth, only a minority of non-institutionalized black youth are employed.[7] His research confirms that as these young men are excluded from participation in the labor market, their chance of future involvement is seriously undermined.

What is happening? The middle seems to have dropped out of the U.S. labor market as the economy has shifted from a manufacturing to a service-based system. Industry has shut down or moved from urban areas to the South, or more recently overseas, where resources and labor are cheaper. For the young and those without post-secondary education, low-wage positions in the retail trade and service sectors have replaced the high-wage jobs formerly provided by the manufacturing sector. **Since 1974, there has been a 25% drop in the proportion of young men employed in manufacturing industries and a 20% increase in the proportion employed in the service sector.** In addition, there has been growing dependence on high technology, which has escalated the education requirements for the higher paying jobs.

According to Gordon Berlin and Andrew Sum, changes in the mix of occupations brought on by structural shifts in the economy have created more low-wage than high-wage positions. Between 1979 and 1985, 8.0 million new jobs were generated while 1.7 million manufacturing sector positions were lost.[8] Roughly one-half of the new jobs created were low-wage and part-time in the retail trade and service sectors.[9] **According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 90% of the 18 million new jobs created in the next ten years will be in the service sector.**[10]

With the decline in industry jobs, young, unskilled workers have suffered the most, as the first fired and the last hired. In addition, this group of workers has traditionally depended upon union organizing within the manufacturing sector to raise their wages 20% - 30% higher than non-unionized laborers. Declines in industry jobs have resulted in a drop in unionization which has disproportionately affected the young worker.

Service sector positions that have replaced industry jobs are low paying, often crowded with young people, part-time, provide no benefits and do not allow for advancement. In addition, the majority of this job growth has occurred outside of metropolitan areas, in the suburbs and outlying areas.[11] It is well documented that disadvantaged and minority youth have great difficulty obtaining jobs beyond their home environments.

There is growing concern that the labor market is closing its doors to those with the least education and skills. Although a large number of service sector positions do not require advanced training and education, education will certainly be the key to higher wages, job security and occupational mobility. At the very minimum, these positions will require good communication and problem solving skills, and competency in reading and math.

To make matters worse, the military, which has been an avenue for disadvantaged youth and dropouts to gain an education and develop skills, has recently slashed the number of new recruits it will admit and upgraded entrance requirements. This will have serious repercussions for inner-city youth who more than ever need a route out of the constraints of their environment. According to James R. Wetzel, the civilian economy must prepare itself to take up the slack: "The loss of such a broad avenue of training, discipline in work-life, and on-the-job experience means a much larger burden on the civilian economy to provide such opportunities."[12]

DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Demographic trends are an often neglected but generally accurate prediction of the future. The total number of youth is declining. Yet, these population reductions are not occurring evenly across racial lines. Minority youth are a growing proportion of the total youth population and the mix of the central city. Unfortunately, minority youth are more likely than white youth to be hampered by the effects of poverty: poor housing and health care, a lack of quality schools and services. Thus, they are less prepared to meet the challenges of a changing labor market.

The baby boom generation, born between 1945-1964, has been replaced by the baby bust generation, 1965-1984, with an anticipated reduction of 7.7 million young people (15 -24) between 1980 and 1995. [13] Although the absolute numbers of youth are declining, the minority youth population is falling at a much slower rate than that of white youth. **The Census Bureau has estimated that the proportion of black youth will rise from 13.7% of the total youth population in 1980 to 15.3% in 1995.**[14]

Because the number of Asians, Pacific Islanders and Native Americans are so small, they are usually considered together. They increased 5% in the early eighties and

are projected to comprise 3.9% of the youth population by 1996.[15] Hispanics are the fastest growing group of young people; their population is expected to double between 1980 and 2000. **By the year 2030, approximately one in every five youths in the U.S. will be Hispanic.**[16]

Because the Hispanic population is growing so rapidly and statistics on them are relatively new and limited (before 1980 the Census did not distinguish between white and non-Hispanic white), it is important to delineate a few factors that exist behind blanket statistics of this population. First, the Hispanic population is a group of individuals bound together by a Spanish origin and language that represent many different countries and cultures. The term Hispanic includes those from Central and South America, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Cuba. The differences among these subgroups in terms of poverty, educational attainment, family structure, etc. tend to be greater than differences among Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites.[17]

Second is the issue of immigration. According to the 1980 Census, roughly one-third of all Hispanics living in the U.S. were foreign-born.[18] There are sharp differences between native-born and foreign-born youth. According to the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Youth and America's Future (hereafter "Grant Commission"), foreign-born youth often arrive in the U.S. from less developed nations, those in which the education and health care systems lag behind the U.S. Such differences among Hispanics must be taken into account when discussing the needs and obstacles of today's young people.

Demographic changes are rapidly altering the landscape of our workforce, our schools, and our neighborhoods. **Where the American labor force had been primarily composed of white males, minorities, white women and immigrants will constitute almost 90% of its net growth during the rest of this century.**[19] Similarly, urban schools have historically educated the majority of white children, but minority children now comprise 30% of our school age population.[20] In fact, "Between 1968 and 1986 the number of white school children fell by 18%, the number of black children increased 5% and the number of Hispanic children increased by 100%."[21] **Today, 22 of the 25 largest central city school systems are predominately people of color.**[22]

Wilson found that despite declining urban population rates, the number of inner-city youth, primarily minority youth, has risen dramatically. Based upon 1980 Census Bureau statistics, such youth are much more likely to live in metropolitan and central city areas than the general population. Furthermore, minority youth are over-represented among those youth living in the central city and under-represented among those living in the suburbs. Fifty-six percent (56%) of black youth live in the inner-city, while only 23% reside in the suburbs.[23] Conversely, 43% of white youth live in the suburbs and 23% in the central city.[24] Ninety percent (90%) of Hispanic youth reside in metropolitan areas.[25]

The geographical distribution of youth also varies by race. Alaska, Hawaii, Delaware, Georgia, and South Carolina have the highest percentage of youth. The smallest proportion of youth reside in Florida, Idaho and Utah. Concentrations of white youth tend to parallel that of the overall youth population. A disproportionate number of black youths live in the South; Asians and Pacific Islanders live primarily in the West; and Native Americans and Hispanics are concentrated in the Southwest and West.

URBAN POVERTY

Many forces are at work inhibiting the success of the disadvantaged urban male. The most crippling condition is their poverty, which is rising dramatically. As job opportunities have diminished in urban areas for the non-college educated worker and qualifications for substantive employment have risen, the proportion of residents living in poverty has skyrocketed.

Nowhere are poverty figures more astounding than in the inner-city. Wilson's analysis of Census Bureau statistics reveals that **between 1970 and 1980, the poverty population in the nation's 50 largest cities rose by 12%, despite a 5% reduction in the overall population of these cities.**[26] The poverty population of the nation's five largest cities (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Detroit), where almost 50% of the total poverty population resides, rose 22%; at the same time, there was a 9% reduction in the total population of these areas.[27]

Impoverished youth are at high risk of inadequate health care and nutrition, poor housing, lack of access to preschool programs, falling behind in school and dropping out, early pregnancy, becoming involved in the criminal justice system and other associated problems. Such conditions create a cycle of deprivation which originates with limited employment opportunities, low wages, too-early pregnancies, and low marriage rates among today's young adults that, if not curtailed, will continue for generations.

FAMILY FORMATION

A rising poverty rate has had its effect on family structure of the young and the increasing number of children growing up in poverty. The poverty rate for young families has doubled since 1973, reaching 30% in 1985.[28] Within this same time frame, the poverty rate among young black families has grown from 43% to 62%.[29]

Between 1974 and 1985, marriage rates declined 46% overall 62% for blacks.[30] Bleak economic prospects of young men may have reduced their motivation to marry and their eligibility as marriage partners.[31] **In the early seventies, 60% of young men without a college degree, ages 20-24, could earn enough through the manufacturing sector to support a family of three above the poverty line; by 1984 only 42% could do so.[32] For black and Hispanic men, the figures are worse.** During that same period, the percentage of black young men who could support a small family declined by more than half, from 55% to 23%, and for Hispanics the drop was from 61% to 35%.[33]

According to Wilson, lack of employment, incarceration, and premature deaths have shrunk the pool of "marriageable" black men in the inner-city. A study by Robert Lerman reveals that young fathers of all races who do not live with their children are more likely than those living with their children and childless men to have a history of poor academic performances and joblessness.[34] It can be inferred that women, whether or not they choose to have children, frequently forego marriage when their prospective mates cannot contribute to the family's financial well-being.

The number of single female heads-of-households has increased and a rising proportion of youth are poor. In 1960, 28% of women (ages 20-24) were not married; by

1988 this percent rose to 61%.[35] **Currently, 3 of 10 adolescents (ages 6 to 17) live in single-parent families.**[36] It is becoming increasingly necessary for a family to have two wage-earners to keep itself above the poverty line. Real wages are declining, and women still do not receive equal access and pay for their work. Thus, a family headed by a single woman is at a great risk of being poor, and potentially chronically poor.

According to Berlin and Sum, given current economic conditions, the likelihood that a child will be poor is directly linked to family structure. Their research indicates that the majority of children living in a female-headed household will spend some of their life in poverty, while only a minority of those youth growing up in a stable two-parent family will experience economic deprivation. According to Ellwood, **two-thirds of the children who grew up entirely in single-parent households spend the majority of their childhood in poverty, relative to only 2% of those who come of age in two-parent households.**[37] Overall, one of five youth is poor.[38]

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

It has been noted that future labor demands will require more highly skilled workers, that those who lack basic skills will most likely be left behind, and that women, minorities and immigrants will comprise the majority of new entrants into the workforce, at a time when proportionately more youth are growing up in poverty. What effect is this having on our educational system and how are young men faring?

Since the end of World War II, there have been significant gains in the high school attainment rates of young men, regardless of racial and ethnic background. Nationally, dropout rates have declined. In some urban areas, however, the dropout rate of young men is as high as 50%. Although general college enrollment rates are up, a large number of youth still do not attend postsecondary institutions. Recently, there has been a significant decline in the number of black and Hispanic high school graduates enrolling in college. And large achievement gaps exist between affluent and poor youth, as well as white and minority young men. This evidence seems to suggest that our system of education is not working well for all of our young people, and may be openly hostile toward some of them.

In 1987, 86% of all young men (ages 25-29) had graduated from high school, 86.5% of whites, 82.5% of blacks and 70% of Hispanics.[39] This is a vast improvement from the 66% of young men that completed high school in 1966 and the 38% in 1940.[40]

The proportion of high school graduates enrolled in college rose between the latter half of the 1950's and the beginning of the 1970's. By 1976, roughly the equivalent number of black and white high school graduates were enrolled in college, 33% and 33.5% respectively.[41] However, **since 1976, black enrollments have declined by more than one-fourth (26.1%) and white enrollments have increased by more than one-third (34.4%).**[42]

High school dropout statistics are confusing because there is no uniform standard. According to Census Bureau figures, the dropout rate has declined from 18% in 1973 to 15% in 1983.[43] This is largely due to improvements among young black men whose dropout rate decreased from 32% in 1973 to about 20% in 1983.[44] Hispanic students have the highest dropout rate. In 1988, nearly 36% of Hispanic youth (ages 16-24) had not graduated from high school. This is three times the rate for white youth.[45]

Many factors contribute to place numerous youth at risk of school failure and dropping out. Those growing up in large metropolitan areas are twice as likely to drop out of school than those from smaller cities.[46] Research concerning the relationship of racial status and the risk of dropout is contradictory. According to Wetzel, "nonpoor black youths appear to dropout at a rate that is only marginally higher than that of white youths, and among all young people from poor families, the proportion of blacks who fail to graduate from high school is actually lower than that of whites."[47] Other researchers argue that racism among faculty, institutions and in the practices of the society-at-large combine to make the risk of dropout greater for all minorities.

Research convincingly shows that poverty is one of the leading causes of school failure and high school dropout. Almost 50% of poor youth (ages 19-23) rank in the bottom fifth of the standardized test score distribution.[48] **Disadvantaged youth are**

three times more likely to leave school prematurely than middle and upper class youth.[49]

In conjunction with poverty, an array of forces permeate American school systems and the lives of many youth, combining to create an environment that is inimicable to student development and success. These forces include: a lack of bilingual teachers and academic programs; a lack of environmental and emotional supports at home; too few significant adult relationships and a paucity of positive role models; low parental educational attainment; low teacher and school expectations; culturally insensitive teachers; unqualified teachers; a lack of supplies and inadequate facilities; disproportionately high suspension rates among certain groups of youth; students who are behind in grade level or older than classmates; high student-teacher ratios; tracking; gangs and school violence; early marriage, pregnancy and parenthood; employment; and a lack of connection between school and work that enables young people to see the value of academic attainment.

The growing concern that our schools, as they currently exist, can no longer meet the needs of our youth, is exacerbated by recent and anticipated economic and demographic changes. In the past it was sufficient for a small proportion of youth to become highly educated to fill the relatively few positions that demanded postsecondary training. Those who could not, or chose not to, pursue an education could find jobs to support themselves and their families above the poverty line. However, this is no longer an option for today's and future generations of young people. As a result, schools are going to have to reassess who they are educating and why, and students are going to have to understand that educational attainment will determine their opportunities for work and self-sufficiency.

DRUGS AND VIOLENCE

Philippe Bourgois states that the day-to-day experience of the inner-city resident, unemployment, racial discrimination and the frustration of not being able to provide for one's family above the poverty margin, produces high rates of crime, violence and drug abuse within these communities.[50] As structural barriers to success, rising unemployment, and poverty have intensified in recent years, it is surprising to many scholars that only a minority of inner-city youth are involved in gangs and the alterna-

tive drug economy. Nonetheless, the fear and destruction that these youth unleash within their communities is cause for great alarm and any attempt to address this situation must realize its political, economic and demographic origin.

When one thinks of the urban disadvantaged young man who is not tied to the labor force and has dropped out of school, the misconception is that he is idle and lazy, committing random acts of crime and violence, both to support and amuse himself. The work of Terry Williams and Philippe Bourgois, among others, convincingly shows that this myth is unjustified.

The majority of those involved in gangs and in the alternative economy are legally employed, or were at one time. They are not naive; they understand that the positions open to them are the least desirable jobs in the U.S. society, that they offer no future of economic security, personal fulfillment or self-worth. In reaction to this indignity, many turn to the avenues of success that are available to them. **These young men view their involvement in the lucrative alternative economy as temporary, to earn enough to one day establish themselves in the mainstream economy.** As Bourgois states,

> "They are struggling determinedly - just as ruthlessly as the railroad and oil robber barons of the last century and the investment banker 'yuppies' of today - to earn money, demand dignity, and lead meaningful lives. Tragically, it is that very process of struggle against - yet within - the system that exacerbates the trauma of their community and destroys hundreds of thousands of lives on the individual level."[51]

The majority of crime and violence committed by inner-city young men is inflicted upon residents of their own community. According to Wetzel, **the young are more likely to be the victims, perpetrators and those arrested for criminal activity than any other segment of the population.**[52] Hispanics and blacks are more likely to be the victims of crime than are whites.

Homicide rates have actually declined in recent years, but the figures are still staggering among young black men, especially in the inner-city. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs re-

ports that in 1984 the homicide rate was 61.5 per 100,000, down from 102.5 per 100,000 in 1970, yet still 33% higher than 25 years earlier.[53] Homicide rates are highest for young black men. Wetzel notes that in 1987, of the 4,500 youth murdered, more than 50% were black youth.[54] **Currently, a young black male has a 1 in 21 chance of being murdered before he reaches the age of 25.**[55]

Nationally, the number of people using drugs has declined among all ages, ethnic and racial groups. According to Wetzel, drug use among high school seniors dropped one-third from 1979 to 1988.[56]

Drug use, especially in the inner-city, is a response to the structural constraints of poverty and minority status in America today. Ann Brunswick argues that, for many young males, drugs afford the only avenue for economic independence and self-sufficiency.[57]

INCARCERATION

Studies consistently show that, regardless of race, young males, with a history of poverty, low levels of education, and a lack of steady employment opportunities are at the highest risk of incarceration. Blacks are proportionately more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system than Hispanics or whites. There is growing concern over the basis of this phenomenon and the repercussions it is having and will have on the lives of these young men and their communities.

Developmental psychologists and sociologists tend to agree that adolescence is a period of profound risk taking and testing of social and parental limits. **Sixty-six percent of all arrested for property crimes and fifty percent of all of those arrested for violent crimes in 1987 were under 25 years of age.**[58] During this same year, "Black youth accounted for 15% of the population under age 18, but represented 45%, 54%, 68%, and 39% of the arrests for murder/nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, respectively, among this population."[59] **One out of every four black males in their early twenties will spend some time in prison, jail, or on probation.**[60]

Research is divergent and limited in accounting for these stark racial differences. Some argue that racial discrimination may be at the heart of this phenomenon. Research conducted by Huizinga and Elliot suggests that minorities are more likely to be charged with more serious offenses, which usually carry a higher rate of incarceration, than whites involved in comparable levels of delinquent behavior.[61] Hawkins and Jones believe that racism is evident by the fact that more blacks are confined than would be expected on the basis of arrests alone.[62]

There is growing concern that rather than creating viable alternatives and structural changes to assist disadvantaged youth, the criminal justice system is being used as a method of "controlling" displaced and deviant young people. Traditionally, the responsibility of socializing adolescents has been left to families and the community: church, school and social services. In areas of poverty, these institutions appear to have broken down or are no longer capable of assisting their young men. **"Hence institutions of social control are often seen as 'last resort' methods of socialization for the youth of the dominant group but as primary agencies of socialization for young persons from subordinate groups."**[63]

Wilson contends that the high rate of incarceration is one factor contributing to the rising number of female-headed households, out-of wedlock births and consequently, the increasing number of children growing up in poverty.

Hawkins and Jones assert that arrest and imprisonment of adolescents is stigmatizing and reduces their chances for future employment. Adolescence is a period when youth should be developing skills and experience necessary for their future in the labor market. When a young man is excluded from this process, his future opportunities are severely affected. Correctional facilities should prepare youth for entry in the labor market once their sentence has expired. Rather, these institutions actually "socialize" youth for joblessness, as evidenced by the high recidivism rates in the criminal justice system.[64]

There is little debate that poverty and joblessness affect rates of incarceration. The stresses manifest by the inability to find gainful employment, prolonged poverty and confronting systematic barriers of racial discrimination may actually create such

alienation from and hostility toward the dominant culture that it leads to criminal activity.

Clearly, a majority of the young men who face the constraints of poverty and minority status in this culture do not become involved in criminal activity, but it is important to recognize that they seem to be the most at risk of being arrested and eventually incarcerated.

LACK OF SUPPORTS

The primary responsibility for youth's social and personal development rests with the family. **Changes in family structure, labor force participation, and the poverty rate have made it increasingly difficult for families to provide their youth with the supervision, activities and supports necessary for a successful transition into adulthood.** There is an increasing number of female-headed households with children. Among the majority of two-parent families, both partners participate in the labor force. Currently, **7 out of 10 school-age children (ages 6 to 17) have mothers who work or are looking for work outside of the home.** This is an increase from 1970 when only 4 out of 10 children had mothers who worked.[65] Thus, more and more youth are coming home to empty houses and, in the case of the inner-city, to unsafe conditions. It is well documented that latch-key kids are at a much higher risk of developing problem behaviors and falling behind in school.[66]

There is a strong need, especially among poor youth, for well-coordinated, accessible and permanently funded youth development programs to assist families in caring for their youth. Many of these programs already exist, yet many lack the resources and coordination with other projects necessary to meet the multiplicity of needs of today's at-risk youth. Children's Defense Fund research demonstrates how many poor and minority parents have little job flexibility, long working hours, little formal education and are unable to afford the cost of many necessary services.[67]

CONCLUSION

Clearly, a growing proportion of our youth and families need assistance if they are to overcome the forces of poverty, joblessness, and racism that place them at a risk of not realizing their potential as self-sufficient and productive citizens. Today's disad-

vantaged young men in urban areas desperately need supervision during non-school and summer hours while their parents are at work: consistent adult relationships, supplemental education, health care and counseling, recreational activities, safe and clean facilities, skills development, improvements in self-esteem and a host of other services. Efforts designed to work with these young men must understand the reality of life in urban areas in the 1990's, that a complexity of interlocking and often contradictory forces shape their choices and future expectations. At present, their options are too limited. It is going to take a sustained and concerted effort on the part of all sectors of society to enable these young men to realize their full potential.

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